

"Better so," sadly soliloquized Worden as he reached home alone an hour later. "What can I offer that delicate creature of assurance of the luxury she is born to? Again, why burden her with a tie that may mean bereavement from the first battlefield? No, it is better as it is."

Six months to the day and Ross Worden, begrimed, footsore, limping wearily, crossed a barren, desolate stretch of Belgian territory just at dusk. He presented the appearance of some homeless refugee, war-driven from shelter and security. In the distance in almost every direction the glow of camp fires showed, and ever and anon a bomb burst in midair.

Half a mile beyond the open stretch was a ridge of hills, and beyond that Ross Worden, fresh from the country of the enemy, loaded metaphorically with information that compromised the "war scoop" of the century, knew where the friendly army lay. Particularly he scanned the observation towers here and there dimly outlined against the fading evening sky. One of them was a signal and telegraph tower. For that he made, eagerly as a pilgrim for a mecca.

He hummed a gay tune as he toiled onward. It was one played that night of the loving-cup episode. He thought of Nella. He took from his pocket his memorandum book. From between its pages he tenderly lifted the rose, now faded, to his lips.

Ah! for her sake was he glad that, striking out on an independent line, he had penetrated to the very heart of the enemy's country, was returning with secret and exclusive information which, blazoned forth to an interested reading world, would signalize intrepid efforts and place him high among the great war correspondents of the year.

With almost a cheer Ross Worden dragged himself into the signal tower. The operator stared askance. A man lounging and smoking nearby

stared, sprang up in astonishment and cried out:

"You—Worden!"

Worden recognized the man, Pierce Disbrow, a journalist of poor repute, a man he did not like. He greeted him in a friendly way, but instantly centered his attention upon the operator. He drew a dozen closely-written sheets from his pocket.

"Union News service, my man," he announced. "You must get this copy to the cable instanter!"

"All right," nodded the man, while Disbrow glared with envy at what he surmised from the exultant face of Worden must comprise some big "scoop."

"Look out!" abruptly shouted Disbrow, and bolted for the open air. The others were not so fortunate. An unexpected bomb had come direct from the enemy's camp across the river. It shattered the frail station as though it were an egg shell. When the devastation was complete Disbrow crept in among the debris. He found the operator dead and Worden insensible and apparently fatally injured. He crept forth again in possession of the "scoop" data of Ross Worden.

Three months later, poor, wretched, limping, a mere shadow of his former self, Ross Worden returned to the city which he had left with such high hopes. When he reported to his news bureau it was to be treated coldly, indifferently, as a man who had failed to make good. It was then that he learned that the news he had gathered at such peril had been used by Disbrow, who had received high credit for the same.

The discovery crushed him. He was still ill from his wound received in the explosion. He sought poor, obscure lodgings; he was prostrated with a fever. To pay his way his landlord piece by piece pawned his few possessions—even the loving cup.

Then a spell of fever and delirium, and he awoke in a beautiful room.